

Message Text

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PAGE 01 SINGAP 02888 290429Z
ACTION HA-05

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 IO-13 VO-05 ISO-00 CIAE-00 INR-10
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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0597
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AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 2888

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF, SN
SUBJECT: PROPOSED SINGAPORE TRANSIT CAMP FOR BOAT REFUGEES

REF: SINGAPORE 1993

1. QUESTION OF STALLED SINGAPORE REFUGEE TRANSIT CAMP PROJECT WAS DISCUSSED BRIEFLY WITH LOWMAN AND FRIEDMAN DURING THEIR JUNE 25-27 SINGAPORE VISIT. DISCUSSION NOTED RATHER WIDE DIVERGENCE OF VIEWS BETWEEN GOS AND UNHCR AS TO NEXT STEP TOWARD REALIZING PROJECT, WITH UNHCR APPRATNELY STILL EXPECTING DIRECT REPLY FROM GOS TO MACE'S DECEMBER 30 LETTER WHILE GOS EXPECTS NEXT MOVE TO COME FROM UNHCR.

2. PROBLEM TO AN EXTENT IS ONE OF PERCEPTION. AS WE UNDERSTAND IT, UNHCR SEEMS TO FEEL THAT GOS FAILURE TO REPLY IN KIND TO DECEMBER 30 LETTER IS BREACH OF NORMAL DIPLOMATIC PRACTICE SUGGESTING LACK OF REAL SINGAPORE COMMITMENT TO PROJECT. SINGAPOREANS, ON OTHER HAND, FEEL THEY HAVE ALREADY GOVEN AMPLE RESPONSE TO LETTER. SHOULD BE RECALLED THAT SINGAPOREANS
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DID NOT MAKE THEIR ORIGINAL OFFER TO UNHCR BUT ORALLY TO USG IN COURSE OF PRIME MINISTER LEE'S OCTOBER 1977 MEETING WITH DEPUTY SECRETARY CHRISTOPHER. WHAT THEY REGARD AS THEIR RESPONSE TO MACE LETTER HAS, IN A SENSE, REMAINED IN THIS ORIGINAL CHANNEL THROUGH SERIES OF ORAL DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR REQUIREMENTS RE ADVANCE GUARANTEES MADE TO AMBASSADOR HOLDRIDGE AND SERIES OF VISITING AMERICAN OFFICIALS IN EARLY MONTHS OF

1978, REINFORCED BY PUBLIC STATEMENTS FROM PRIME MINISTER LEE DURING HIS AUSTRALIA VISIT. THIS REFLECTS PRIME MINISTER'S STATED VIEWS OF UNHCR AS WE HAVE REPORTED THEM ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS; STRESSING THAT UNHCR HAS NO POWER IN ITS OWN RIGHT TO SETTLE REFUGEES, LEE REGARDS IT IN THIS MATTER AS AGENT FOR THOSE GOVERNMENTS (HEADED BY USG) THAT ARE ACCEPTING THE REFUGEES. RESPONSE TO UNHCR LETTER HAS THUS BEEN DIRECTED AT SPONSOR GOVERNMENTS RATHER THAN THEIR AGENT.

3. THIS EXPLANATION MAY BE BIT TOO PRECIOUS BUT WE BELIEVE IT IS GENERALLY HOW SINGAPOREANS REGARD SITUATION. WE DO NOT SHARE APPARENT UNHCR VIEW THAT GOS HAS NO REAL INTENTION OF GOING THROUGH WITH PROJECT, BUT AT SAME TIME WE SEE NO PROSPECT THAT SINGAPOREANS WILL RESPOND IN WRITING TO DECEMBER 30 UNHCR LETTER IN ORDER TO GET BALL ROLLING. THEY INTEND TO WAIT FOR A REPLY FROM UNHCR (OR FROM THE GOVERNMENTS WHOM THEY SEE AS UNHCR'S SPONSORS) ADDRESSING QUESTION OF ADVANCE GUARANTEES WHICH THEY HAVE SPELLED OUT IN DETAIL BOTH PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY.

4. OCCURS TO US THAT THERE MAY BE WAY OUT OF IMPASSE SHORT OF PERSUADING UNHCR TO TAKE NEXT STEP. QUESTION OF INDOCHINA REFUGEES HAS BEEN PROPOSED BY ASEAN COUNTRIES FOR INCLUSION ON AGENDA OF AUGUST 3-4 US-ASEAN WASHINGTON TALKS. SINCE INITIATIVE HAS COME FROM ASEAN, WE SEE NO REASON WHY U.S. DELEGATION COULD NOT, WHILE DISCUSSING THIS AGENDA TOPIC, ASK SINGAPORE DELEGATION

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TION ABOUT PRESENT STATUS OF SINGAPORE TRANSIT CAMP OFFER, WHAT HAS BEEN HOLDING IT UP, AND WHAT SEQUENCE OF MOVES GOS ENVISAGES TO GET IT MOVING AGAIN. THIS COULD SERVE AT LEAST TO CLARIFY SITUATION AND PERHAPS PROVIDE OPPORTUNITY TO GET GOS AND UNHCR TALKING AGAIN. WE RECOGNIZE POSSIBLE PROBLEM OF DRAWING ATTENTION OF OTHER ASEAN MEMBERS TO ADVANCE GUARANTEES FOR GOS WHICH COULD NOT BE EXTENDED TO THE OTHERS, BUT THIS MIGHT BE SIDESTEPED BY STRESSING THAT ANY GUARANTEES WHICH MIGHT BE FORTHCOMING WOULD BE CONFINED TO SPECIAL CASE OF REFUGEES PICKED UP BY MERCHANT VESSELS (NOTING HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO ENCOURAGE MERCHANT VESSELS TO PICK THEM UP).

5. IMPORTANCE OF ESTABLISHING SINGAPORE TRANSIT CAMP ADMITTEDLY HAS DWINDLED SOMEWHAT SINCE IT WAS FIRST PROPOSED BECAUSE IT HAS BEEN POSSIBLE TO OPERATE IMPROMPTU TRANSIT FACILITY FOR 500-PLUS REFUGEES THROUGH USE OF AD HOC ADVANCE GUARANTEES. AS REPORTED REFTTEL, HOWEVER, WE STILL BELIEVE PROPOSED CAMP WOULD BE OF SIGNIFICANT HELP IN HANDLING INCREASING FLOW OF REFUGEES.

INGRAHAM

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
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